

# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

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## Future New York Openings

Wish You Were Here-Imperial, 6/25/52. Leland Hayward and Joshua Logan present new musical by Logan and Arthur Kober, with music and lyrics by Harold Rome...A Night in Venice-Jones Beach Stadium, 6/26/52. Mike Todd's super outdoor production of new version of Johann Strauss' operetta sponsored by NY State Park Commission.

## Digests of Current Reviews - Cast Changes

The Moon is Blue-Henry Miller, 3/8/51. Maggie McNamara, who is replacing Barbara Bel Geddes for four months, won split decision from the reviewers who covered her performance. Hobe, Variety, Rice, Post and Sheaffer, Eagle, agree that the young actress is one of the most attractive seen in NY in seasons. Because of her looks the latter two reviewers were ready to overlook the fact that her acting ability isn't on the same par. Barry Nelson and Donald Cook are still solid comedy performances, critics noted. Variety critic reported that McNamara not only hasn't the technique of playing comedy, but her voice, inflection and enunciation lack distinction and grace.

I Am A Camera-Empire, 11/28/51. Barbara Baxley, replacing Julie Harris who left for a film assignment, won modified approval from Hobe, Variety, and Sheaffer, Eagle. Both realized that no one could follow the outstanding performance of Harris, and credited Baxter with doing remarkably well in an impossible assignment. Sheaffer did feel at time that Baxter was imitating her predecessor. Second visit to John Van Druten play convinced that play itself had been overlooked in original reviews. William Prince praised for giving a smoother performance.

The Fourposter-Barrymore, 10/24/51. Betty Field and Burgess Meredith now compromise entire cast of Jan de Hartog's play. Pollock, Compass, felt relaxed performances converted obvious, sentimental comedy into lovely, fresh and endearing job of acting. In addition the play itself often becomes moving as well as constantly amusing. Rice, Post, enjoyed present cast better than original, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, but after his third visit to play he still wishes for more inventiveness from the playwright.

## Strawhat Season Starts

Opening bill of St. John Terrell's Music Circus at Lambertville, NY, enjoyed by Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun. Blossom Time score continues to contain many of Schubert's immortal melodies, while the cast was sound both musically and theatrically...Shuberts' attempt to bring theatre to Westchester County, NY, fizzled. Hobe, Variety, panned first production, The Singing Girl, as a pretty sorry affair. Though billed as a new musical, trade paper reviewer reveals it was inspired by an 1896 script. Because of poor attendance project at White Plain's County Center will probably be dropped.

## News & Notes

Mrs. McThing run extended to July 19, company will play Central City, Colo. in August, returning to Morosco on September 8...London Theatre play bills exhibited at British Travel Association, 336 Madison...June "Show Train" on New Haven RR for Top Banana...Council of Living Theatre planning ten play season in Washington, D.C. with a \$38 subscription top.



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' Green Room Department '  
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REVIEWERS ROLE...Future of theatre is to be guaranteed by critics hitting second and third rate productions on the chin, urges George Jean Nathan, Journal American. Reviewers aren't doing anyone favors by optimistically praising poor productions. Critics must realize theatre is something bigger than their own comfortable jobs. Chapman, News, points out that reviewers would be jobless if they praised shoddy productions.

SEASON STATISTICS...Billboard records 20 hits this past season, trade paper taking 100 performances as guide...Variety totals show more than 29 million dollars gross for Broadway shows in season with total of 1072 weeks played...Show Business notes increase in theatre uplift groups, as well as in groups aimed to harass theatre. Included in latter are congressional committees, American Legion and Wage Earners' Committee.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Wish You Were Here, thanks to three weeks of paid previews, will be seen by everyone but the critics by opening night, notes McCord, Herald Tribune...Actors Equity initiation fee of \$100 hinders many from landing summer stock roles, comments NBC Pearson, Critic at Large...Negro revue with Ethel Waters, Billy Eckstine, King Cole, Cab Calloway suggested to further important role of Negro in American theatre by Coleman, Mirror.

BEST BETS...Time recommends: The Male Animal, Pal Joey, The King and I, The Moon is Blue, Guys and Dolls, and South Pacific...Morehouse, WT&S, adds Paint Your Wagon to same list for summer visitor.

COLUMN TIPS...Ticket brokers burning at producer of Broadway hit, whispers Eaton...Wish You Were Here first act being rewritten, reports Winchell.

"PRO" EARLY CURTAINS...1:30 PM matinees urged as more realistic by Washington Heights NY, ORT Women's Club, Dash, Women's Wear reports...Ninety-three percent of 1600 responses to Transportation Displays, Inc, survey of New Haven RR commuters are for an early curtain nightly, Morehouse, WT&S, details. Advertising agency plans survey of all commuter lines, with results to be released in the fall.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES..."Talent Pool," regular productions for newcomers styled after "Stage Managers Club-Talent '52" suggested by Betsy Holland, who received many job offers after her appearance at Talent '52, Rice, Post, reports...John Golden now producer of The Male Animal, figures he has produced 100 flops, and less than 50 hits, he told Hawkins, WT&S. Among other theatre innovations, Golden was first to use audience picture post card.

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' Theatre News Roundup '  
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Twenty years of set designing celebrated by Howard Bay at New Gallery, 63 West 44th Street exhibit open until June 24...Jack Albertson subbed one night for Phil Silvers, Top Banana...New Faces of 1952 honored by New York Dress Institute at special fashion show...Paul Dullzell reelected chairman of executive committee of Chorus Equity for 33rd time...Ruth McDevitt and Regina Wallace returned to The Male Animal...Leo G. Carroll appointed artist-in-residence for summer at Stanford University...Audrey Meadows replaced Rose Marie, Top Banana...Ralph Bellamy elected to New York City Center Board of trustees...Norma Thornton succeeds Helen Wood, Pal Joey...ANTA plans second ANTA ball for next winter...Greek National Theatre visit next year sponsored by ANTA...Lawrence Langer to inspect theatre situation in Europe...25th anniversary of Milton Smith as director of Columbia University Theatre Associates celebrated at "surprise party"...Stock Managers and union talks continue...Musicians union ruled that lead piano at summer theatre must get \$205 a week.

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' Visit to NJ Music Circus '  
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Theatre pessimists who never go to summer theatres because they are convinced that they are always leaky, smelly barns with hard, wooden benches, haven't heard about St. John Terrell's Music Circus at Lambertville, NJ. New Yorkers who shun summer time productions of operettas and musical comedies because they are always poorly done by bad singers in costumes that never fit, haven't seen the superb professional productions staged each summer by the founder and patent holder of the "music circus" idea -- St. John Terrell.

Starting his fourth year of operation Terrell, whose first name is pronounced "Sin-Gin," opened his brand new, multi-color tent with a lively, jazzed up version of Sigmund Romberg's Blossom Time. Sixteen week season will include Firefly, Roberta, Carousel, Girl Crazy, Student Prince, Three Musketeers, Kiss Me Kate, Allegro, Where's Charley and Miss Liberty. Last week of September Terrell will bring Jose Greco and his Spanish ballet troupe to his audience. Each of the 1500 seat holders to the arena-staged productions is provided with a comfortable canvas chair. Thanks to Terrell's invention of umbrella-type structure to hold up the tent, there are no quarter poles to obstruct the view. Tent itself has a flap on top which may be opened to let out the warm air; while for late September warm air may be piped into the tent to keep it at 70 degrees.

But the show inside the tent is only half the fun. Outside the circus motif is carried to the concession stands, the seats, the posters. Opening night Terrell added a Swiss bell ringer, imported from Coney Island, an ambitious performing chimpanzee and a display of fireworks. All performed before the show and between the acts. Located on the top of a hill the theatre overlooks the towns of Lambertville, NJ and New Hope, Pa. It is 30 miles from Philadelphia, and 65 miles from New York. Across the Delaware River is the Bucks County Playhouse, where Terrell acted years ago.

The audience comes to have a good time and enjoy the music, Terrell told "Critical Digest." Looking over the crowd at intermission he stated that it was neither a typical theatre crowd nor a typical Blossom Time crowd. He does think his audience is among the politest in the world. Not only do they applaud their own local favorites, he continued, but they stay to the very end of the "curtain" calls. Terrell is expanding his operations, having a share of the business in the "Music Circus" set up this summer at Asbury Park, NJ and Sacramento, Calif. In addition the other groups throughout the country using his tent, scripts and ideas pay him a royalty. This winter Terrell plans to perfect his portable "Music Circus" tent, with chairs mounted on trucks. Terrell believes arena staging of old favorites are popular because the musicals done this way are completely different, no matter how many times the audience has seen them.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Shows that closed include Three Wishes for Jamie...Of Thee I Sing received reprieve, cast and staff working for minimum, Billy Rose donated Ziegfeld rent free for summer and tickets were cut to \$3.60 top.

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